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THE SUEZ CRISIS

*Submitted by the*

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*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.*

*Concurred in by the*

**INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

*on 5 September 1956. Concurring were the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Director of Intelligence, USAF; and the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the IAC, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.*

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## PROBABLE REPERCUSSIONS OF BRITISH-FRENCH MILITARY ACTION IN THE SUEZ CRISIS<sup>1</sup>

### THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable repercussions, in the Middle East and elsewhere, of a British-French move to resolve the Suez crisis by military action against Egypt.

### THE ESTIMATE

#### Introduction

1. Assuming that the British and French use military force against Egypt, it will probably be after they are confronted by another direct and major Egyptian challenge — such as Egyptian denial of their transit rights through the canal or violence against their nationals. They would consider that such an action would improve their chances of justifying the use of force before world opinion.

2. We do not estimate in this paper the repercussions in the Middle East of a British-French acceptance of a peaceful settlement. The UK and French governments, however, have almost certainly estimated that a compromise with Nasser on the principle of international control of the canal would greatly weaken their position in the Middle East and Africa. They may believe that use of force would produce less undesirable consequences than would such a compromise. Therefore, even without further provocation, they might resort to force if convinced that negotiations were not going to produce a prompt settlement satisfactory to them. In these circumstances, they would attempt to document Nasser's refusal to negotiate such a settlement, and to dramatize it before world opinion as justification for the use of force.

<sup>1</sup>This estimate does not consider the question of whether the British and French will take military action against Egypt. Indications that they may do so, however, are sufficient to warrant this estimate of the probable repercussions of the action if it should occur.

#### The Impact Within Egypt of British-French Military Action

3. Barring the unlikely prior entry of substantial numbers of Soviet personnel for combat duty, British and French forces now in the Eastern Mediterranean could probably attain their purely military objectives in Egypt within a very few days. Within 24 hours, they could probably seize key points along the Suez Canal by amphibious landings in the Port Said area and airborne landings near Ismailia and possibly elsewhere. However, it would probably be about a week before military control of the canal could be assured, and in any case Egyptian execution of prepared demolitions and other blocking operations in the canal could not be prevented. The time required to remove obstructions from the canal cannot be foreseen.

4. If the bulk of Egyptian forces remains concentrated along the Israeli border, British-French forces could quickly capture Cairo and other main centers in northern Egypt, and organized Egyptian military opposition could probably be overcome within three or four days after the initial assault. If there had been redeployment of Egyptian forces from the Sinai, the operation might take about a week to 10 days.

5. Nasser might put poorly organized and obviously ineffective forces into the battle, and attempt also to organize civilians for passive resistance on a large scale, in order to drama-

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tize the plight of Egypt, and to stir up additional world indignation against the British-French action.

6. Despite the probable early cessation of regular military operations, rioting and destruction of property would probably occur in Cairo, Alexandria, and other cities. There would probably also be substantial guerrilla activity by elements of the regular armed forces and by Nasser's "Army of Liberation." Most of this activity would probably be suppressed within a few weeks and essential order maintained throughout most of Egypt. Nevertheless, small-scale but widespread acts of sabotage and terrorism would almost certainly continue, and Egyptian restiveness under military occupation would be manifest to the world. Nasser would probably seek to dramatize this resistance and to furnish a basis for UN or other international action by establishing a government-in-exile in one of the other Arab or Asian states.

7. Even if effective security were established, the British-French occupation would almost certainly have to be prolonged. It would be extremely difficult, although probably not impossible, to find Egyptians willing to assume the responsibilities of government under foreign auspices and to meet British-French terms on the canal issue. Moreover, it is almost certain that a government thus established could not long continue in office once British and French troops had been withdrawn.

#### Arab World Reaction

8. Anglo-French military action against Egypt would provoke a violent anti-Western popular reaction throughout most of the Arab world. Anti-Western demonstrations and riots, affecting US installations and personnel, would be likely in most major population centers. The local authorities would probably be unable or unwilling to restore immediate order, though this might be less true in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, where security controls are relatively strong. Rioting would probably be most serious in West Jordan, Amman, and Damascus, where anti-Western feeling is already high and security controls tenuous.

9. Such anti-Western manifestations would be vigorously encouraged by the USSR and local Communists and by Nasser as long as his radio and other propaganda facilities were functioning. Egyptian agents, assisted to some extent by local nationalists, would also attempt widespread sabotage of Western installations. Those attempts would probably be most successful along the pipelines and in the pipeline terminal areas of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, with the main efforts being directed initially against the Iraq Petroleum Company lines. Some damage might also be done to oil installations in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and Aden, despite the efforts of the local authorities to prevent it.

10. Virtually all the Arab governments would make gestures of solidarity with Egypt and would publicly protest the violation of Egyptian sovereignty and independence. Syria, for example, might shut down the IPC pipeline. In this initial period the chances would be about even that Nuri would feel compelled to withdraw Iraq from the Baghdad Pact. Regardless of their personal feelings, all Arab leaders would feel it necessary to make such gestures to avoid having popular emotion on the Suez issue turned against them. Moreover, while most of the leaders of other existing Arab governments would probably be privately glad to see the end of Nasser, this feeling would be offset by their concern over the reoccupation of an Arab state by Anglo-French military force. Notwithstanding Arab League or other agreements, however, the other Arab governments would almost certainly not commit their regular military forces in support of Egypt and indeed would not be able to do so to any significant extent.

11. How far the Arab governments would go toward a serious break with the West would probably depend on how successful Nasser and his supporters were in maintaining and dramatizing resistance to the British and French. If, contrary to our estimate, the organized military resistance of the Egyptians were prolonged for a considerable period, the popular rioting and demonstrations taking place in other Arab countries would probably remain at a high pitch. The governments of most of these countries would probably countenance,

and perhaps organize, acts against Western personnel and installations and lend assistance to the Egyptian cause. The governments of Jordan, Libya, and Iraq would almost certainly renounce their treaty relations with the UK if they had not already done so. The situation in some of these countries might become so disastrous for Western interests as eventually to require Western military intervention to restore and maintain order.

12. On the other hand, if as we estimate, Nasser's organized resistance collapsed in a matter of days, we believe that while the Arab leaders would continue vociferously to condemn the Western action and to proclaim their support of Egypt, a number of factors would incline them as a matter of expediency to refrain from acts seriously damaging to Western interests. Political leaders in the oil producing states of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and to a lesser extent the pipeline states of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, would be aware of the danger of losing their oil revenues. The leaders in Jordan would probably be somewhat constrained by the Israeli threat to their country, and by their dependence on Western subsidies. In addition, with the passage of time there would be some decline throughout the Arab world in the position of those elements which had relied on Egyptian encouragement, example, or subsidy, and an increase in the relative strength of their local rivals. Thus some of the elements of the opposition to the Nuri regime in Iraq would be eliminated, and Egyptian-supported forces in Lebanon would be weakened. In Jordan, the latent strength of the refugee-Palestinian elements and the internal divisions in the military establishment would continue to endanger the government, but the threat of a coup by pro-Egyptian antimonarchical extremists would probably recede. Over the course of time the violent manifestations of popular emotionalism would gradually subside, and the danger of new riots and demonstrations would lessen. Nevertheless, popular anti-British and anti-Western feelings throughout the area would remain at a high pitch for a protracted period, and the danger of assassination or other acts of individual terrorism

against those suspected of undue partiality for the West would continue almost indefinitely.

13. While the various Arab governments would probably adjust themselves to the changed alignment of forces in the area, neither they nor the Arab people would be reconciled to the occupation of Egypt or to the occupation of any other Arab country should such become necessary. Basic anticolonial and anti-Western tendencies would be greatly reinforced and resentment of the continued presence of Western power elements in the Middle East would be intensified, even though violent manifestations were temporarily subdued.

14. During the crisis most Arabs would increasingly regard the USSR as the friend of Arab nationalism, the enemy of imperialism and colonialism, and a righteous opponent of the use of armed force against weaker nations. The political and moral appeal of the USSR, already strong in some elements of the Arab world, would almost certainly increase greatly. We believe that this increase would only be offset to a slight degree by the demonstration that Soviet arms and political support did not save Egypt from foreign occupation. On the whole, the Arabs would become more susceptible to Soviet influence.

15. *Effects of a Possible Coup in Syria.* In Syria, the possibility exists of an attempted coup by conservative and pro-Iraqi forces, perhaps with British encouragement, or conversely of an attempted coup by leftist Egypt-oriented military elements and the Arab Socialist Resurrectionist Party. Action by either wing would touch off counteraction by the other. The outcome of such a conflict would depend heavily on its timing:

a. Under present circumstances in Syria, if the conflict took place prior to the British-French military action, a conservative move would have backing by Iraq and Turkey, probably including the use of Iraqi military forces now deployed within striking distance of Damascus. In the latter case the move would have a substantial chance of success. Regardless of its outcome, an attempted pro-Iraqi coup would widen the split within the Arab

world. If successful, it would be a blow to Nasser's prestige, and might consequently provoke an Egyptian reaction which would incite or be used to justify British-French military action against Egypt.

b. However, at the time of and shortly after British-French military action against Egypt, anti-Western feeling would probably be too strong for a conservative pro-Iraqi coup to succeed except possibly as the result of outright military action by Iraq. The Iraqi government might wish to launch such action, but popular feeling in Iraq would regard it as exploiting Egypt's difficulties, and in the face of such sentiment the Iraqi government would be unlikely to go ahead.

### The Role of Israel

16. We consider it highly unlikely that the Israeli government would take advantage of a British-French military operation against Egypt to launch unprovoked major attacks on the Egyptian forces in Sinai or against any of the other Arab states. Despite probable demands for action on the part of Israeli extremists, Israeli government leaders would probably feel that, with the most serious military threat to them already being taken care of by others, the possible gains of military aggression would be considerably outweighed by the political risks involved. In particular, the Israeli government almost certainly recognizes that the Western powers could not let it get away with such an attack if the West wished to preserve any standing with the other Arab states.

17. However, if there should be a serious breakdown of internal control in Syria or Jordan, we believe the Israelis would probably take the opportunity to seize the demilitarized areas and to achieve some minor rectification of boundaries. We do not believe it likely that they would make major seizures of territory. In any event, Israel would maintain a strong military posture along its borders and would probably respond promptly to any provocation.

### Soviet Reaction

18. The USSR would take vigorous action both directly and in the UN to exploit the

adverse reactions in the Arab-Asian world to the Western action and to make capital of its support of the Arab cause. It would seek to organize collective moral, political, and economic support of Egypt and might dramatize the issue by covertly inciting civil disturbances in colonial areas. It would probably offer with greater expectation of success further aid to other Arab nations now dependent upon Western sources of income. By intensive agitation of the issue of Western "aggression" it would endeavor to make it costly for any Asian-African leader to identify himself with the West. It would also exploit opportunities for causing friction among the Western allies, particularly between the British and French on the one hand, and West Germany and the smaller NATO countries on the other.

19. Although the USSR, either directly or through its Satellites, would probably be prepared to furnish materiel and possibly additional specialists and technicians to Egypt, its opportunities for doing so would be limited if the British and French achieved a quick military victory. If the military action in Egypt should be prolonged the USSR or its Satellites might make statements and military redeployments calculated to alarm European or other countries; we do not believe, however, that these would go to the length of actual attacks, even on a small scale. We believe that the USSR would not directly participate in the fighting in Egypt. However, the situation could develop in such a way that the Soviets would become more closely involved: for example, through the stopping or seizure by the British or French of Soviet shipping in Egyptian waters, or the capture of Soviet personnel in Egypt.

### Effects on the North African and Cyprus Situations

20. A successful demonstration of British and French military power in Egypt would, at least for a time, considerably bolster the strength and prestige of the British and French governments at home and their power position in the Mediterranean. The morale of the rebels in Algeria and Cyprus would be lowered,

and Egyptian political and material support for the Algerian rebels would be ended. Thus, the British and French might gain an opportunity to move towards settlements in these areas on terms they would presently regard as meeting their minimum conditions. In other countries — Morocco, Tunisia, Libya — the basic situation would probably not be substantially affected, though for a time there would probably be difficulties in relations between these countries and Western nations.

#### General Free World and UN Reactions

21. British-French military action against Egypt would provoke strong adverse reactions within the Afro-Asian area and in many other portions of the world as well. We believe that the bulk of Afro-Asian opinion would overwhelmingly consider mere Egyptian refusal to accept international supervision or control of the canal as an inadequate justification for Western military intervention. Moreover, it is possible that many Afro-Asian countries might condone some Egyptian interference with Western shipping through the canal if clearly undertaken in retaliation against Western economic harassment. Although the adverse reactions in the Afro-Asian world would be considerably reduced if Nasser without provocation had demonstrably interrupted the flow of canal traffic, few of the Afro-Asian leaders could publicly condone the use of force, which would be widely interpreted as a reimposition of "colonialism" on Egypt. India in particular would almost certainly take the lead in moves for condemnation of the Western action.

22. The reaction of Western European nations would be mixed. Although most would probably be relieved to see the canal removed from Nasser's unilateral control, those with economic interests in the Arab-Asian world would wish to avoid too close an association with the action for fear of jeopardizing their economic and political position in that area. There would be considerable concern lest the British-French move lead to increasing Soviet involvement and hence to a dangerous rise in East-West tensions.

23. In the probable event of appeal to the UN General Assembly by the USSR, India, and others, we believe that Egypt's partisans would obtain support from the Soviet Bloc and almost all Arab-Asian countries. The attitude of Latin American countries and of many Western European countries would be influenced heavily by the nature of provocation prior to the British-French action. If Egypt had merely rejected the London Conference proposals, enough of these countries would probably vote against the British-French position so as to produce a GA majority, at least for condemnation. Even if Egypt had impaired operation of the canal or if violence had taken place against Western nationals, the British-French action would be attacked vigorously in the UN.

#### Effect on the US Position

24. A decision by the British and French to go ahead with military operations against Egypt would pose serious problems for the US regardless of what position it took. Should the US openly throw in its lot with the British and French, even without committing troops, it would thereby incur most if not all the risks and drawbacks involved in a resort to force. Throughout the Arab-Asian world it would be attacked as the ally of "colonialism" and "imperialism" and charged with having been hypocritical in its initial espousal of moderation in the Suez crisis. In addition, the dangers of violence against US installations and personnel would be enhanced, with TAPLINE probably becoming a major target. King Saud would almost certainly act to prevent violence and sabotage against ARAMCO installations and personnel and by virtue of his dependence on oil revenues would probably seek to avoid a break with the oil company. Thus he would probably not interrupt oil operations. However, he would be under some compulsion to show disapproval and might demand immediate withdrawal of the US Air Force from Dhahran.

25. A US effort to disassociate itself would provide some opportunities for efforts at conciliation and localization of the conflict. However, serious problems would also ensue:

a. The British and French might reconcile themselves to US refusal formally to associate itself with the venture, but they would expect US sympathy and diplomatic support in what they considered to be a defense of vital Western interests. Moreover, it would be extremely difficult for the US to avoid an open indication of approval or disapproval during UN deliberations.

b. If the US came out sharply against the UK and France, a considerable strain would be imposed, at least temporarily, on US relations with its principal allies. Moreover, such US opposition, unless it extended, for example, to a vote of condemnation in the UN, would be unconvincing to large segments of public and official opinion, particularly in the Arab-Asian world. Some might even believe that US noninvolvement was a pose resulting from a secret agreement with the UK and France and that the US could have prevented the British-French military action if it had really wished to do so. Among those who accepted US noninvolvement as a fact, a large and possibly a majority element in the Arab-Asian world would probably attribute the US unwillingness to support the British and French to lack of resolution or election year expediency rather than to any real sympathy and understanding for the rights and aspirations of the ex-colonial nations.

c. Finally, though threats to US installations, personnel, and interests would probably be somewhat reduced, they would still be substantial since much of the Arab popular reaction would be indiscriminately anti-Western. Despite its efforts to remain aloof, the US would thereby be forced to consider the diplomatically delicate question of direct military intervention to safeguard US lives and property.

#### Longer Range Implications for the West<sup>2</sup>

26. Even though the more violent of the manifestations of Arab-Asian emotionalism over a British-French military move against Egypt

would sooner or later subside, the Western action would be so deeply resented that fundamental nationalist and anti-Western feelings would be magnified for years to come. This is not to say that the use of military force against Egypt would of itself fatally weaken the Western position in the Arab-Asian area. Much would depend on the length, severity, and mode of termination of the occupation of Egypt. Much would also depend on Western success, under the circumstances, in finding leaders willing and able to cooperate with the West. Use of military force against Nasser would remove the chief organizer of nationalist pressures against the West in the Middle East, and it might temporarily check the erosion — inevitable in the long run — of the Western position of special privilege in the area. However, it would also probably cause the nationalist attack on this special position to rebound later with increased vigor, and by reviving Arab-Asian fears of colonialist domination, would make more difficult the establishment, over the long run, of a normal and mutually advantageous relation with the Arab-Asian states.

27. Throughout the underdeveloped areas of the world, this deepened suspicion and resentment of the West would provide new opportunities for the Communist powers, which have already had substantial success in convincing the Arab-Asian nations that they are willing to extend friendship and support on a basis of full equality. The Sino-Soviet Bloc would almost certainly take full advantage of these opportunities to extend its economic penetration of the area, to increase its diplomatic and cultural ties with the Arab-Asian nations, and to spread the concept that the interests of the underdeveloped nations lie more with the Communist powers than with the West.

<sup>2</sup>As noted in paragraph 2 above, it is beyond the scope of this estimate to weigh the consequences of not using military force against Egypt, i.e., of making a compromise settlement with Nasser.

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